



San Diego City Attorney **MICHAEL J. AGUIRRE**

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 15, 2006

Contact: Maria Velasquez, Communications Director (619) 235-5725 (pager & voicemail) mvelasquez@sandiego.gov
Councilman Ben Hueso's Office: Whitney Benzian, Press Secretary (619) 533-6501

OWNER OF RAT-INFESTED SAN YSIDRO MOTEL SETTLES CIVIL COMPLAINT WITH THE CITY

City Attorney's Office settles case involving nuisance activity and numerous code violations

San Diego, CA: The owner of the Valli-Hi Motor Motel in San Ysidro, whose property was infested with rats, will pay significant civil penalties and relocation costs for motel residents as part of a civil settlement that was filed by the San Diego City Attorney's Office. Ing-Wen Hwang has owned the motel for fourteen years. Poor property management, combined with years of deferred maintenance and neglect, resulted in fire code and electrical violations, infestation of rats, and substandard conditions in the rooms.

"The owner has changed property management and is cooperating in addressing these violations," said City Attorney Michael Aguirre. "While he has expressed a long term commitment to cleaning-up the property, no community should have had to tolerate the blight and despicable activities that became part of this neighborhood."

The case was prosecuted by the City Attorney's Code Enforcement Unit. According to Head Deputy City Attorney Diane Silva-Martinez, the settlement requires the owner to immediately deposit \$55,000 in a trust account and relocate approximately 35 long term residents at the Valli-Hi Motel. By law, the maximum number of days a motel guest is allowed to stay at a motel is 30 days. Some residents have been residing at the 100-room motel for more than ten years.

"Since taking office, the motel had become a high priority for my district," said Councilman Ben Hueso. "Due to the constant nuisance activity in and around the premises, the Police Department received numerous calls. It is my hope that the residents of Valli-Hi will begin to feel safe in their own homes," he added.

Lack of security and failure to properly screen motel guests over the past year, resulted in numerous calls for Police assistance to the Valli-Hi Motel, which is located at 655 W. San Ysidro Avenue. In addition to correcting all code violations, other terms of the settlement require the owner to:

- Pay \$225,000 in civil penalties (\$150,000 is suspended pending compliance with all code violations).
- Immediately deposit \$55,000 in a trust account to relocate approximately 35 long term residents at the Valli-Hi Motel.

(MORE)

- Immediately hire a state licensed, uniformed security officer to patrol the property from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. daily.
- Pay investigative costs to the City of San Diego in the amount of \$13,368.
- Work with the Police Department to properly screen all residents and improve property management.
- Make a \$5,000 donation to a non-profit agency in the San Ysidro area whose mission includes, but is not limited to assisting the elderly, homeless, or poor.
- Substantially improve the aesthetic appearance of the property by complying with all landscaping requirements on the property required by the San Diego Municipal Code.

At today's press conference the \$5,000 donation was presented by City Attorney Aguirre and Councilmember Hueso to the "Hearts and Hands Working Together", a non-profit agency which serves the needy in San Ysidro.

The City Attorney's Code Enforcement Unit was established in 1984 to address nuisance properties and blight throughout San Diego. The Unit works in partnership with the City Attorney's Neighborhood Prosecution Unit, the City's Neighborhood Code Compliance Department, the San Diego Police Department, and the community to identify and aggressively address nuisance properties. Community members can report property violations to the City Attorney's Code Enforcement Unit at 619- 533-5655.

###